

Lincoln County Do-It-Yourselfers



What to Do if You Find Vermiculite or Asbestos In or Around Your Home or Business

Environmental Resource Specialist – (406) 291-5335

EPA Information Center - 501 Mineral Avenue, Libby, MT 59923 - (406) 293-6194

DEQ Troy Information Center – 303 N. Third St.; Troy, MT 59935 – (406)-295-9238

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Vermiculite in Libby



For several decades, vermiculite was commonly used in and around homes in Lincoln County for a variety of applications, including as a soil additive, construction aggregate, and attic insulation.

If vermiculite is present, it might contain Libby Amphibole asbestos (LA), which may be more toxic than other varieties. Exposure to LA could lead to such serious diseases as asbestosis, lung cancer, or mesothelioma. It will take several years for EPA to complete its cleanup activity in Libby and Troy. Residents might encounter vermiculite during that time, even after EPA has finished its work. It is not possible for EPA to remove (or even know about) *all* of the vermiculite in the area. In some cases, it will intentionally be left in sealed walls, home foundations, attics, crawlspaces, and other relatively inaccessible areas.

Some encounters with vermiculite will be small in volume, such as a handful, and might include:

- **minor renovations**, such as removing old carpets or drywall, installing ceiling fans, or removing wall outlets
- **routine landscaping**, like gardening, rototilling, or mowing

There will be times when a large pocket of vermiculite is discovered, for example:

- **extensive digging** – for septic systems, sprinklers, or water lines
- **major renovations** - taking down walls, putting in windows, etc.
- **fires** - fire-fighting and subsequent cleanup

Protect Yourself

If you encounter vermiculite, it is likely that you will be exposed to Libby Amphibole asbestos. **If possible, leave it alone.** Hiring a licensed asbestos contractor to clean up vermiculite spilled while working on your home is strongly recommended to minimize your exposure. If you are unsure of what to do, call the **Environmental Resource Specialist (ERS - (291-5335))**. If you choose to continue working in contaminated areas, take the following steps:

Take Steps to Avoid Exposure

1. Keeping in mind that any amount of vermiculite may cause a significant exposure risk, for a small indoor quantity, such as a handful of vermiculite, use a damp paper towel to scoop up the material into a sealable plastic bag or jar. Then use another damp towel to wipe down the area. Place the used paper towels in the container and throw everything away in a proper receptacle (a covered trashcan is OK). For a small quantity of vermiculite in soil, such as a very isolated area or a few random flakes, it is recommended that you wet it and try to work around the area. **If possible, leave it alone.** If the material is buried, keep it that way - it's better buried than at the surface.
2. HEPA filter vacuum cleaners are effective on small quantities of vermiculite found indoors. **Never vacuum vermiculite with a regular vacuum cleaner.** HEPA vacuums and wet wiping can be used periodically to remove small amounts of vermiculite introduced into your home. Use a HEPA vacuum to remove dust from previously inaccessible locations such as under recently removed carpets, appliances, and furniture.

3. For larger quantities of vermiculite, such as what you may find in a breached wall, do not disturb the material. **Do not vacuum large amounts of vermiculite - even with a HEPA vacuum – leave the material alone and call the ERS.**
4. Dry mowing or rototilling in yards and gardens where vermiculite is abundant might cause asbestos to become airborne. We encourage sprinkling your yard or garden with water before mowing or tilling. **Consult with the ERS if you are unsure about the vermiculite content in your yard.**
5. If you encounter a large amount of vermiculite in soil that cannot be avoided, such as when it is used around structures like pipes or foundations, or as bulk fill – **do not disturb the material, call the ERS.**
6. If you are planning on remodeling your home, find out if there is vermiculite in the attic or walls (drill small pilot test holes) or in any other material that will be taken out, disturbed, or is likely to create dust. You can call the EPA Information Center at 293-6194 or the DEQ Troy Information Center at 295-9238, if you are unsure. You should also be aware of specific state and local regulations regarding remodeling, demolition, and disposal that may impact your work, especially on big projects.

Renters - You have a right to know about any adverse conditions at your rental. Ask your landlord about the presence of vermiculite. If you do not receive the information you request, contact the EPA Information Center, ERS, or DEQ Troy Information Center (please provide proof of residency).

Libby Amphibole (LA) might be considerably more toxic than other commercial asbestos products. It should be avoided or handled with extreme care. Exposure to Libby Amphibole asbestos has resulted in disease in workers and non-workers who have had contact with contaminated materials. There is no known threshold risk level for asbestos-related materials, and any exposure will increase the risk of asbestos-related disease. The health risk from exposure to **all** asbestos depends greatly on the amount of asbestos in the material you are disturbing and how long the exposure lasts. If you take the basic precautions outlined in this fact sheet, work on your project will be much safer. It should be noted that regular dust or “painter’s” masks are not effective in reducing exposure to LA.

Who Can I Contact With Questions About Asbestos?

EPA Information Center - (406) 293-6194
DEQ Troy Information Center – 295-9238
ERS – (406) 291-5335

The EPA, ERS, or DEQ might send personnel out to inspect a situation involving vermiculite or Libby Amphibole asbestos. This guidance might include advising the owner to allow EPA or a licensed asbestos contractor or inspector to take samples, conduct cleanup, or take other special measures to reduce the risk of asbestos exposure. A list of approved asbestos inspectors and contractors is available at the Information Centers.

Montana Department of Environmental Quality - Asbestos Control Program (406) 444-5300

Montana law requires that employers hire a licensed inspector to determine if asbestos is present before doing any work. Asbestos that is not associated with the Libby vermiculite mine is still regulated by Montana DEQ. If non-Libby Asbestos is found, it should be dealt with according to Montana regulations. Explore Montana DEQ’s Asbestos web site at: www.deq.mt.gov/Asbestos

Please learn about the risks of asbestos exposure and basic precautions by reviewing these fact sheets (available at the **Information Centers** mentioned above) or the website listed below:

- **HEPA Vacuum Cleaner Program – May 2007.**
- **Contractors & Tradesmen Working Indoors – June 2007**
- **Contractors & Tradesmen Working Outdoors – June 2007**
- **Explore the EPA web site and its links at: www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/libby**